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A Letter to a Neighbor



Joseph S. Auerbach

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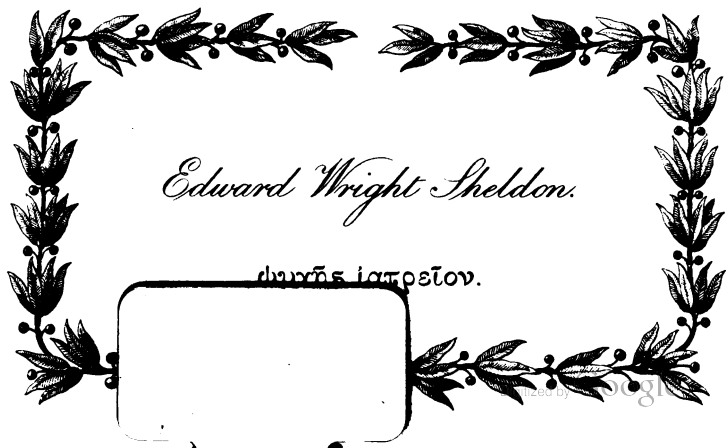
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A Letter to a Neighbor

To-day

The Soldier of the Union

On Some To-morrow

The Coming War

Joseph S. Auerbach



G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York London

1918

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Publishers' Note

THE accompanying "Letter to a Neighbor," "The Soldier of the Union," and "The Coming War," by Mr. Joseph S. Auerbach, are published as quickening contributions to the literature of the war.

The personal note in the letter does not detract from, but, on the contrary, adds to its significance and appeal, and it can be read with profit by every soldier who goes to the front, and by every lover of that soldier; while the two poems are a salutary featuring of the duty of the hour with reference to this present

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war, as contrasted with the war of to-morrow for the ideal State and a more responsive citizenship. Only if these considerations be unmistakably visualized by us shall we fight, now and then, with a true understanding for a sure victory.

The publishers wish to express their indebtedness to the *North American Review* for permission to republish the contents of this book, which appeared, respectively, in the issues of December, 1917, and April, 1918.

JUNE, 1918.

A Letter to a Neighbor

MY DEAR NEIGHBOR:

It will always be a deep regret to me that I was unable on account of illness to be at the meeting on the Sunday evening before a number of you went to camp; but Dr. Pershing, who, like his cousin, General Pershing, is not without stern ideas of command, forbade my going. Deprived of that opportunity, I am, so soon as equal to it, writing to all the Selected Men of our neighborhood this letter, which is in part what I should have said if with you then.

No one, as he begins to realize what this world conflict means,—and it has taken time for us all to understand it fully,—can look into your faces or think of what you are about to do without an increasing emotion. Then, too, it is possible that I experience that emotion somewhat more than would a stranger, for to the fathers and mothers of many of you boys my father was for years in this neighborhood the beloved physician; and he put aside more than one offer which would have been to his worldly advantage to go elsewhere, because he chose to live his life here, among them of whom he was rightly so fond.

Knowing, therefore, the stock from

which you have come, I can testify how you will acquit yourselves; and I am sure that my feeling towards you, in a sense peculiar to myself, justifies me in writing to you as one affectionate neighbor to another.

It had been suggested that I speak to you on the day of your parade, but those in charge of the entertainment thought it better that you have one evening undisturbed by any serious address. Nevertheless it occurred to me, and doubtless to you as well, that there was evidence then of the emotion I refer to, as the gentlewomen of this neighborhood, out of an awakened devotion, came literally to serve you at dinner. What they did was intended to be

symbolic of the higher service they and all of us would render you, in recognition of the service you are to render to your country and to the world. There was, too, an added bit of sentiment when at each table on their request you wrote out your names for those who had thus served you—and they for you their names on your request—so that you both might feel in closer touch with one another in the momentous days to come.

Indeed something of vital consequence had happened; for the day before you scarcely knew them and perhaps cared less about them, and it was the same, doubtless, with them concerning you. Then, in a

moment, the spirit of brotherhood abroad in the land gives them towards you and you towards them a new-born sense of kinship.

Against such an army, when disciplined, of which the recruits are thus sent forth, no machine-made army, however vast, can stand.

The arrogant German nation committed the fatal error of presuming that its cruel army was an army to conquer with. But a conquering army is not an aggregation of units drilled to do evil things. It is a body of devotional men disciplined by resolve as well as by the manual exercise, having one heart that throbs with a common human impulse, and one soul quickened by a transforming

faith. Such is this new and Grander Army of the Republic, in which you are to be the good soldiers.

This machine-made army, moreover, is nothing but a manifestation of German development, which in matters of socialistic advancement, such as governmental fostering of industry, old age pensions, and the practical abolition of poverty, we had been taught to believe had so much to its credit. Now we must conclude that this so-called civilization was not "made in Germany," as goods were made in Germany, to be sent to all the world for the world's advantage, but made in Germany for German consumption; made in Germany so that the Ger-

man conscience might be drugged with the full dinner pail; made in Germany so that Germans might be strong at the appointed time to rush forth in fury to send brave but unprepared men to death and captives into bondage, and to do the wrong compared with which bondage or death is a benediction.

We are told by President Wilson that the German nation is to be divided into its people and the ruling classes. May we all share this thought. Though remembering the unspeakable things the German soldier and officer has done of his own motion, as well as by command, to create within the subjugated territory of Belgium and France "An

Empire of Death," let us resolve that for "The Day" of the brutal toast of degenerate roisterers there shall be substituted the day of an awful reckoning for the miscreant, whether of high or low estate. Let us welcome the coming of this day, not in a spirit of vengeance, but with the thought that these horrors shall never happen again, and that through such compulsory sacrifice there may be some hope of absolution for the German race.

The occasions have been many in history when nations have been required to defend the integrity of their country, the lives of their citizens, and the honor of their flag. At no time, however, have the

enlightened peoples of the world stood shoulder to shoulder, not only to defend what is peculiarly their own but imperilled civilization which a mad nation would destroy. You are like the Crusaders of old; and yet the Crusades, despite all their exalted chivalry, compared with this war, were almost visionary. For those wars of the centuries were waged to wrest from infidel barbarians the tomb to which so much of modern civilization is traceable, while your high calling is to put on the khaki of opportunity, to the end that you may do your privileged part not only in saving that civilization, but in establishing a new reign of justice and righteousness among men.

Surely in such a crisis you could not think of exchanging that khaki for civilian attire, were the choice accorded you.

Even men who have forfeited much of the esteem of their fellow men and who must be strangers to many thoughts which urge you on, are laying down their lives without a murmur—not for their country, since some of them can scarcely be said to have a country, but for mankind. You have doubtless heard of the Foreign Legion in France. Into its ranks men may come, whatever their past, with not even the surrender of citizenship. France does not ask of these men “What have you done?” but “What are you willing

to do?" Some of the riff-raff of the world are in it, but they have done deeds of which history will be very proud. Nor have these men, save in heroic endeavor, changed over-much. A short time since there was a description of this Foreign Legion in one of our well-known magazines. The narrator told how he had fallen asleep in a temporary trench, with the dirt piled high in front of him. He awoke to realize that a German shell had struck this dirt and buried him alive. Suddenly he heard the sound of digging and knew that his comrades were striving to rescue him; and by-and-by they succeeded. Later his gratitude was somewhat tempered by the rather humorous

discovery that one of his rescuers had taken his money belt. Yet no grievance is harbored against the light-fingered benefactor; on the contrary, excuses are offered for him, ending with this all-embracing thought of our common brotherhood in this warfare: "Besides, he was a member of the Legion."

Realize, too, that along with the khaki, you have put on something you are never to take off and become the men you were. When you come back, as the most of you will, do not think for a moment if you are a carpenter that you are to drive a nail or saw a board or build a house, as you once did; or if a bayman that you will row or sail a boat in the old

way, or if a farmer that you will guide a plow as before. No, into your life has come a vision, without which, in the language of Scripture, the people perish. In a measure it has come into the lives of all of us, as well as into your lives. Favored by the light of this vision men will not go about their accustomed walks of life with quite so many idle, aimless thoughts. Something, which though it seems new is very old, has been born again among us, signifying that more than ever before are we to take our neighbor and the State into account in our scheme of life; and to the extent that we all cherish this something of the spirit and compel it to grow, will the responsive citizenship

of America become one of the chief and increasing glories of the world.

You must have seen more than the beginnings of this new impulse among your neighbors: There is Mr. Pettit, Chairman of the Exemption Board, to which this community can never discharge its debt of gratitude. He it was who, with eloquent voice, told you so persuasively what the call of our country means; and to the honor of this community for all time, of less than 400 men who have gone to camp 250 of them were practically volunteers, without any claim of right to the exemption many were entitled to. You were not so much Called to the Colors as that you Came to the Colors. Then there was

Dr. Pershing, the good physician among us, untiring in his efforts. It was the delight of both these men to give lavishly of their professional time to the embarrassment of their practice; and throughout it all they were ably seconded in their efforts by the unremitting, unselfish work of their associate, Mr. Kelsey. Nor must you forget what Mr. Adelberg—a stranger almost to many of you—did in opening his “Cedarhurst Hall” for each contingent of you as you went away, not only providing the dinner for you and the entertainment afterwards, but housing you there for the night in such attractive surroundings.

Above all, I know you will keep

as a thing very precious the memory of the devotion of the fine men and women of this neighborhood who, in season and out of season, have sought to minister to you by their constant, sympathetic interest, and who have made a covenant with themselves and with you, that in no way shall one of the loved ones whom you leave behind suffer deprivation of any material comfort, because you have gone to serve your country.

Of course, there is no regret on behalf of yourself that under such auspices you go to the front; on the contrary, you must feel something like the thrill of a great joy.

“Somewhere in France” this or that part of our army is often

reported to be by the newspapers. You, too, will soon be "Somewhere in France." Well, suppose the worst—for soldier-fashion you must look that contingency in the face without faltering—and that one of you was certain he would be in France forever! This would not deter men like you. For in the hour of your country's peril the alternative would be, if you had the choice to make it, to live the humdrum life we all more or less are compelled to live and then reach a ripe—no, it would not be a ripe, would it, but rather a rotten old age—and be buried in some unvisited grave in a neglected cemetery with a headstone telling when you died. Though if one of you is thus

to be forever in France, be sure that there will be lines on the pages of history—as imperishable as the heroism of a supreme sacrifice always is—telling not *when* you died but *how* you died. For your country would write your epitaph.

This, however, would not be the end, for to die like that is not to die but to live. And when the most of you come back do not think for a moment that you are to come back without the few who may thus be forever in France. No! Within your ranks, as really as if they were there in bodily presence, they will come with you—perhaps to the Hall of your leave-taking that you may be greeted there by some of us

influence your lives and the lives of their families, and the lives of all men in the land, in a larger degree than you can ever do yourselves. I do not care whether one belongs to the Roman Catholic Church or the Protestant Church or to no church or what his views are of an hereafter; he is a Fool who does not believe in the survival of the spiritual in the world; and he is a greater Fool who does not believe that the spirit of the man who dies that the spiritual may live is itself immortal.

Let me add this. Life is not to be all vision. There must be the admixture of sight, for if there be too much of either, men stumble in one way or the other. The sight you

must have along with your vision is not alone a willingness but a cheerful eagerness to undergo the drudgery of camp training so that you may learn enough of the cruel trade of war to be fitted for the work you are to do. Otherwise, you are not likely to be good soldiers of the Republic but victims of your own folly. A sullen acquiescence in what doubtless may often seem to you irksome and unnecessary exactions will not suffice; but work, set to the music of a song, will mean that your patriotism is a faith and does not begin and end with lip-service and flag-cheering.

I had intended in my address to remind you of that wonderful Bible

story of Gideon as illustrative of the need of fitness for warfare, and I asked Mr. Bumpus, our Episcopal clergyman—who spends so much of his time in doing things for others—to tell it for me to those at the meeting. Let me tell it to all of you, for it is worth the re-telling.

Some of you perhaps may not even recall it, for, alas, so few people read the Bible to-day. And though I do not wish to usurp the province of the minister and speak as a revivalist, let me urge upon you, whether or not you look upon the Bible as the book of orthodoxy it was once regarded to be, the wisdom of reading it at all times, and particularly now. For many reasons it

is well for you to do this. Even if you wish only to have a vocabulary above that of the street corner, you must know the Bible words and Bible diction. But, believe me, you will discover much more in the Bible than its vocabulary. When at the suggestion of Mr. Choate, who died serving his country, I once wrote an essay on the Bible—he told me that scarcely a day passed when he did not read this Book of Books. I shall be glad to send each of you, who will let me know that he would care for it, an autographed copy of this little volume; because if the book has any merit it is that of persuading persons to turn to the Bible and learn of its treasures.

Now, this story of Gideon is told

something after this fashion: and as in so many other Bible stories, the characters are supposed to talk with God.

Over against Gideon and his army is the host of the Midianites, and he is not, as you are, even confident of the issue of the coming battle. He asks, therefore, for this sign from the Lord: that if in the evening he spread out the fleece of wool, in the morning the earth about the fleece should be dry and the fleece of wool wet with the dew. The sign was given him, and the story says that the next morning he "wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water." Yet he wished to be reassured and for the next morning he asked that the fleece which he was

again to spread out should be dry and the earth about it wet. Again it was as he had asked and now he was prepared to lead the attack; but the Lord said that the army must first be sifted so as to know of its courage. Therefore He told Gideon to offer to all those that were "fearful or afraid" the choice to depart, and more than a score of thousands went their way. Once more Gideon was ready to give battle, but the Lord required now that the army be sifted again to learn of its prudence. Accordingly he was directed to take those that remained to the water, and try them there by the manner of their drinking; and all those who bowed upon their knees to the water,

thoughtless of the danger before them, were to be put aside, and only those who caught the water in their hands and lapped of it, as "a dog lappeth of water," with eyes to the front and on the foe, were to be chosen to answer to the roll-call. Then though but three hundred remained, these tried men went forth and prevailed.

So, because you are to go forth, not only fervent of spirit and unafraid, but disciplined in valor and with your faces toward the light, I, on behalf of our neighborhood and of all neighborhoods in this land wish you good cheer and Godspeed.

JOSEPH S. AUERBACH,

HEWLETT, LONG ISLAND.

OCTOBER 27TH, 1917

To-day

The Soldier of the Union

A stricken soldier faltered on death's
field

Surrendering of blood unto the State,
For her, enriched in strength, to
dedicate

His eager gift of life to sword and shield;
So that advantaged valor might not
yield

Hope's standards, where defeat must
subjugate

The truth, which makes men free and
only great

And is to all but fiends by God revealed.

Would we attest our love for this fled
soul

To dwelling-place of fame, and his
desire

From out the cup of bitterness to quaff
Of death with blithe salute, upon the
scroll

Of our resolve be vows of faith and fire
That wrought in deeds shall be his
epitaph.

On Some To-morrow The Coming War

Greet folly as fit prompter at harangue
Of emulous divines whose utterance,
That unbelief for its foul progeny
Has whelped this fiend of universal war,
Is but the counterfeit of pious thought.
These prate as if because men cling no
more

In childish faith to obsolescent creed
God had ordained that through re-
morseless years

Commissioned rivers must run red to
seas,

And lands, once gay in pride of charm,
repine

For banished harvests' bloom and
reapers dead;

Whilst undesirous, heavy-laden winds
Come with dread moaning of sore-
stricken men,

And gloating outcries of more infamous
Adepts at ghastly and revolting trade
Taught best in Hell, apprentices whereof
Alike have been the victors and the slain.
So too does reason scoff at skeptic sneer
That in this anguished darkness of the
world

Falters but guttered candle of true
faith,

And that its pristine light shall dawn
no more

To recompense the vigil of the soul
With trust in a pervading Providence.

For when Time to posterity's avail
Shall inventory the estates we leave,
In none such vacancy will there be
found

The wisdom justly meriting acclaim,
But mockery of outlook upon life,
Impoverished cavil with unpurposed aim
Concerning only licensed deeds of guilt
That wrong had wrought and servile
custom brooked.

We know how portents menacing may
breed

Contagious ills, if swept not as of old
By the destroying besom of God's will;
And how from torpid and oblivious sleep
Presaging death, awakening must some
At times by the alarm and guns of war.
And though bereavement may not stay
its tears,

Uncomforted amid this spectacle
Of savagery's carnival of blood,
Untutored thought alone dare harbor
doubt

That in some overruling, sentient mind
Reside the sovereign and sequent plans

To bring to consummation all resolve
Instinct with aspiration's dreams and
prayers;

That Heaven in the grapple of vain lords
Sides ever with slaved children of
crowned greed

Condemned to grope in shadow of the
sword,

Until at last for martyred souls is fame
And shaft to tell the death of vassalage.
Recurring cycles of assuaging years
Confirm to us this truth; and when dire
need

Has moved the pity of God's care, He
sends,

Full quickened with the breath of His
desire,

Anointed messengers to heal the hurt
And bind the wounds of ages in a day.

So 'mid dark terror surety we may have

That though despair be life's investiture
And for ascendancy Hell wars with
Heaven,

Unto a wronged and desecrated earth
Envisioned hours will come to manifest
Guilt-weary nations resting on their
arms,

Enfeebled with a profitless debauch,
And suppliants for interceding grace:
The monarchs, whose hereditary lust
Of rule, grown pitiless by nurtured hate,
Had banqueted upon the blood of men—
With heads divested of presumptuous
crown

Which a deluded world has too long
deemed

The sanctuary for kings' murderous
thoughts;

And paled servitors, peopling ghostly
ranks

Bereft of countless ones unsepulchered

Save in welcome graves dug by their
own hands

As refuge from insatiate onset,
Or unremitting and relentless shell;
And mourners in habiliments of woe
To match the lamentation of their song.

Then for the soul, in votive consonance
With vibrant waves of faith that court
release

From their serene ethereal domain,
The void, clairvoyant after solitude
And dowered with divinity of speech,
Will hold discourse by more inspired
Voice

Than hearkened to when bush or moun-
tain-top

Or pagan fane was the appointed place
Wherefrom a god would counsel with
his race.

It will not dwell on concepts of foul shame,

Nor tell the story of infernal vows
To which base hordes of men were con-
secrate,
And will disclaim avenging thought for
crimes
Of miscreant king or serf; at assize
Shall they be doomed where red-robed
justice sits
Afar from Mercy-Seat; yet even there,
—Or else the Christ has lived and died
in vain—
A monster may by contrite deed be
saved
From pangs and horrors of exultant
death;
Albeit a righteous God would never
dare,
Since He would have men glory in His
name,
To let Hell's awful terrors chained at
last

Go free again to drench the world in woe.
There will resound the clarion summons
To souls required for the venturous
pledge
To compass and destroy sin's hateful
haunts,
Where long ago there scarcely had been
gained
The outposts of its cruel citadel,
Defiant yet to every sacrifice
Those arrogant, barbaric walls to raze.
Responsive to the words of that appeal
Legions will rally to be volunteers
For whom enlistment is to be through life,
Though no enrollment there would be
vouchsafed
Till choice had been accorded those
dismayed
And fearful of the contest to ensue,
To take departure from among that
throng;

And of the ranks thus by withdrawals
thinned

There shall be trial made to know aright,
Whether with prudence panoplied are
they

Whose prowess only may not win the
goal.

So through dismissals but the few shall
stand

To answer to the roll call of the Lord—
A mighty marshaling of His elect
Twice-sifted like the band of Gideon
For combat with unnumbered heathen
foes.

To these accepted ones that pleading
Voice

With suasion of Archangel will proclaim:
“You are the heralds of a new made
earth

To bear glad witness of oncoming hosts

Who following in footsteps you make
safe

Shall enter and possess the promised
land.

If you would falter not in days to come
Bid you forever to corrupting ease
Farewell, to self and its consuming love
Which burns resolve to ashen nothing-
ness,

And leaves no soil wherein brave deeds
may root.

As you with vows and girded loins go
forth,

Have shield as well as spear at your
behest;

Fervor denied restraint invites defeat
And weaponless are you without re-
source

Which only discipline can give to faith.
Nor faint for that your numbers be so
few;

As prophesied of old, the victory
Not always with the multitude abides;
It is the loyal Remnant which so oft
Has served as ransom for a craven bond—
The veteran few, with crust for a repast,
Who nourished by high purpose for their
 strength
And beating back the onslaught at the
 walls,
Have sallied forth with might imperious
And awed usurping wrong to abdicate
The place possessed by cunning's de-
 vious art
Or wrested from the watcher by assault."

The Voice will say how past reverse was
 met,
And a redeemed world had recreant
 been
To trusts which truth admonished it to
 keep,

Turning deaf ears to wisdom's messengers
Whom it saw laughed to scorn and
overcome,

Nor murmured aught at their ignoble
fate.

And since as new crusaders in those
ranks

They would essay once more a pil-
grimage

Which oft-times saints had been unequal
to,

There shall be warning from the solemn
Voice

Of vicious and destroying ills, at war
With man's progression towards diviner
things:

Of ominous greed that fattens on the
food

Heaped up by those enforced to live in
dark

Prone unto earth, without the ecstasy

From dreams of fairer dreams or
communion

By the dulled toiler with an ordered
mind;

Of mouthing of the pharisaic creed,
And unbelief and baleful blasphemy
At altars raised to the subservient gods;
Of wandering upon treacherous ways
Where one must go companion with
pretense;

Of shrines dust-laden and unvisited
Where vaunting valor had forgot to
kneel

And shrive itself for quest of hallowed
cause;

Of spurious fame and riches vast and
power

That guile sells in the market-place for
souls.

Arraigned will be the servitude of child,

Foul blight of manhood and of mother-
hood,

As noisome growth like unto basil-plant
Flourishing upon graves of buried hopes
Of parentage, and the despondent State;
The guilty hands with boastful proffered
gifts

Whereto loud almoners aver no claim
If challenged in the court of conscience;
Youth without thrift and old age
mendicant;

And gold that tarnishes in misers' chests
Or traffics in the virtue of the weak,
Or buys preferment for dishonored aim;
Custom or law, that cringes at demand
Of labor truculent with weaponed threat,
Having no retribution for misdeed;
Justice blind and so enmeshed in
precedent,

It may not minister to mute distress;
Privilege inherited or purloined

That with supercilious glance and mien
And the affronting tongue bids insolence
Connive through power to rob desert of
 meed;

And vain desire with lordly recompense.

Against such wrongs and their accursed
 brood

Which maim and slay was warfare to be
 waged

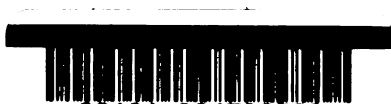
Till peace abide in honor's dwelling-place
Untenanted by feud, and barren lands
Aflower appear, where blood protesting
Of heroic dead had mocked endeavor
Of shamed dust to apparel its dull self
With beauty's garb of herbage and the
 rose;

Till knowledge have no borders for her
 realm,

Well-springs of reason be the source of
 faith,

Life the fruition of ennobling zeal,
Man worship a true God and laud the
State
And be forever to his neighbor kin.

At last the Voice in reassuring note
Will covenant with all those dauntless
ones,
If on the march they be dispirited,
For hope renewed and vehement delight
Through languid days, and for prophetic
dreams
By night of Triumph's strains in temples
blest
With benediction of benignant stars
And oriented to the coming Dawn.



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This Book is Due

ANNEX

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